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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

PREACHERS and Christian writers of to-day have to face a new situation. Hitherto they could take for granted that their hearers and readers in general did not question the fundamental principles of Christian morality. Certain beliefs and certain standards of good living were accepted as authoritative, however they might be violated in practice.

The scepticism of to-day, however, goes very deep. Nothing is counted sacrosanct, nothing authoritative. The very foundations of religion and morality are assailed. It is boldly suggested that the whole idea of God is nothing more than a dream, that there are no standards of morality other than our own ultimate convenience, and that the only life worth living is that in which we make the most for ourselves of our short years here.

The Christian preacher and teacher must face this situation and adapt his message to it. In a recent Swarthmore Lecture, the suggestion was made to the Quakers that the almost exclusive emphasis laid upon the Inner Light by George Fox was due to the fact that he lived in an age of dead orthodoxy when the Christian facts were universally accepted but a living Christian experience was unknown. It was argued that, as times had changed and the Christian facts were now widely called in question, it was necessary to broaden the Quaker message so as to defend and make explicit elements in it which George Fox could safely take for granted.

This has its application to Christian teaching in general. The preacher must begin at a point where he can make contact with his hearers. If he begins by taking for granted what they deny, or assuming what they do not believe, then his subsequent reasoning loses all its force. However grand the superstructure of his discourse it will be regarded as no better than a castle in the clouds, because it lacks a solid foundation. It is, therefore, particularly necessary in these days to dig deep and to confirm, as best we may, the foundations of the faith.

A very excellent bit of work in this direction has been done by Professor L. W. GRENSTED, D.D., in a series of broadcast talks which are now published under the title of *Religion : Fact or Fancy ?* (S.C.M.; 1s. 6d. net). In these talks three fundamental questions are dealt with, namely, Is any ultimate belief possible ? Is there a final moral standard ? and Is there a life worth living ?

The first of these questions deals with the problem of Faith, its difficulties and its influence upon life. Faith is regarded by many to-day in a very light-hearted manner. It is looked upon as a mere matter of choice whether a man belongs to this Church or that, or to any Church at all. It is not too much to say that tolerance with other men's views has become a kind of epidemic disease. How often is it said that 'it doesn't matter what a man believes, so long as he lives up to his belief.' In reference to that it should be pointed out that 'the calamities of the world to-day are a tragic disproof

of this proposition. Wrong belief becomes perilous when men do live up to it. Sincerity can be a terrible thing when it rests upon a lie.' Faith of some sort is the foundation upon which all human conduct is built, both good and bad.

It is, therefore, of prime importance to inquire as to the reality of faith in God. Many in our time have lost that faith. 'They have lost all ultimate belief in a Reality, a God, by which opinion may be tested, and proved true or false.' The modern psychologist aids this unbelief by his talk of projections and fantasies. 'Do we not fashion in our dreams the shadow-figures that embody our desires, and fears, and hopes? What more is this God of whom we speak than the shadow of a dream? He may be more, it is true, but how can we know? Is any ultimate belief possible?'

In seeking an answer to that question we must first be sure that we understand what is meant by faith. 'It is not a matter of believing something, though such belief may be a necessary accompaniment of faith, but of believing in something.' This may sound much the same, but actually it is quite different. It is not a question of accepting certain facts as true, but of having confidence in something or some one. Faith in its nature is practical rather than speculative. In a word faith means trust, and where it is trust in a person it comes very near to love.

When we understand it in this sense, then we may readily perceive that the need and power and inescapable necessity of faith is part of our essential human nature. At every moment and on every hand we are compelled to trust, otherwise life and action would be impossible. We trust in the constancy of Nature; we trust in the goodwill, the ability, the wisdom of men and women around us and throughout the world. There may be mistakes in our apprehension and failures on the part of others, but without a continual exercise of faith, human life simply could not go on.

Now this faith always points to a reality outside ourselves. Even the philosopher who formally doubts or denies the reality of the external world is compelled to act like the rest of us on the assumption that the external world really exists. Otherwise his speculations would abruptly terminate with his life. 'When we come to the higher levels of the structure of our personality, we find that these instinctive ways of behaving are linked together into a more permanent whole by our response to the other persons among whom we find ourselves. This is an essential element in all human life. We are not truly human beings at all except in so far as we are built up into living relationships with other people.' We do not prove the existence of our friends, nor seek to prove it, but we experience their reality in a more convincing way through contacts in faith and love.

All this has an immediate bearing on the question whether any ultimate belief is possible. If we are asking whether there is any final system of knowledge which we can attain, the answer is no. 'But if we are asking whether there is a belief, a faith, by which a man may live, unswerving and unafraid, the answer is yes. Everything that we know about man and his development points in that direction. . . . If the real world outside us is such that faith and love are our highest type of response, then it is not too great a step to believe that the whole world of reality has itself the character of love. But is not this exactly what we mean when we say that we believe in God—a personal God, for faith and love have no meaning except in a personal setting?'

In answer to the second question, Is there a final moral standard? we might begin by pointing to the fact of conscience. Many, however, believe there is no final standard, that conscience is nothing but the product of our own desires and inherited prejudices. But this is an inadequate explanation. For it is quite possible to have a desire for a certain course of action and a strong prejudice in favour of it, and yet to know clearly that we ought not to follow it.

Conscience may speak with different accents in different people and at different times, but always there is that strange voice that speaks. The fact

that standards exist, however varied, by which men feel themselves bound to act, implies a very great deal more. These standards really embody ideals of character. Before each man's mind there is a picture, however distorted, of what he feels he ought to be. From this point of view it can be seen that moral progress is not simply a negative process consisting in the repression of desire, but a strongly affirmative choice of the higher way. The ideal exerts an inspiring and creative influence on character and conduct.

Always this ideal remains unsatisfied, never finding its complete embodiment in any of our actions or in any code of rules. But the Christian affirmation is that in Jesus Christ 'the moral choice is seen complete and unfailing in its acceptance of the highest, even though that acceptance took Him to the Cross. He revealed God, for in Him that Creative work which belongs to God as Creator went out fully into the lives of men.'

As to the third question, Is there a life worth living? it is obvious that life must be something more than a 'mere struggle to hold one's own with moderate comfort for the brief span of our earthly journeying.' Anything along that line fails to meet man's deepest need, and when pursued is apt to lead in the end to soullessness or radical cynicism. Yet man feels that 'somewhere, somehow, there is a life worth living.' It must be a life which is effective in the sense of producing fruits of enduring value. And the Christian answer is that we shall find this good life 'not to be some pattern of universal prosperity and good fellowship, but rather a way of living the lives that we have to live, despite all their imperfections and inadequacies.' Jesus Christ 'stands clear before us as the embodiment of an ideal, perfectly human and yet in His humanity making manifest all that creative, self-giving love can be.' The good life will be a life ruled by this ideal. 'It will grow into greater riches of its own as it surrenders itself more and more wholly to live for and to serve others. So, serving others, it shall come to God.'

As noticed in another column of this issue, Emeritus Professor W. Emery Barnes has published a little volume dealing with the recent Form Criticism—*Gospel Criticism and Form Criticism.* It is a subject which we have been keeping before our readers; but it has awakened such widespread interest that we have no hesitation in recurring to it, especially as the work before us is a strong plea for a cautious consideration of it.

Dr. Barnes complains that the champions of Form Criticism are in the habit of putting aside the testimony of the second century, which Lightfoot, Westcott, Hort, and others so learnedly elucidated. Of these champions Martin Dibelius is the foremost, and, therefore, it is to his chief book, 'From Tradition to Gospel' (Eng. tr., 1934), that criticism is here directed.

Now, according to Dibelius, an Evangelist would have at his disposal no connected narrative (except probably a narrative of the Passion), but only separate stories; and these were preserved in the earliest Christian sermons. With the object of getting behind the gospel to the tradition the Form Criticism sorts the gospel sections into three main classes: Paradigms, Tales, and Legends.

From a study of the notices of sermons given in Acts it is claimed that we know what kind of matter would be used by the earliest preachers. This kind is called a Paradigm, that is, an example used in support of the preacher's message. There are three tests for identifying the Paradigm: (1) it must be externally rounded off so as to form a natural unit; (2) the narrative must be brief and simple; (3) it must culminate in some striking word or deed of Jesus, as in the case of His blessing little children, or the story of His relatives.

But Dr. Barnes, while appreciating Dibelius's apologetic aim in separating the Paradigms from the Tales and Legends as the less trustworthy matter, is of opinion that there is too much subjectivism in the method of the Form Criticism. Have the Form Critics so fine a sense of what the earliest Christian missionaries would put in their sermons as to be

able to distinguish genuine Paradigms from the general text of the Gospels? And do they suppose that the reports of the sermons in Acts are complete, or even that they are sufficiently full to give us more than a taste or sample of these sermons?

As for the Tales, the name itself indicates the Form Critic's view of the historical value of the narratives relegated to this class, such as nine narratives of miracles in Mark beginning with the cure of the leper and ending with that of the epileptic boy. Indeed, the miracle is usually for Dibelius the stamp of the Tale as distinguished from the Paradigm. It has breadth and not brevity, descriptiveness and not restraint, even a secular tone, and a conclusion emphasizing its reality.

But can we accept Dibelius's distinction, as thus outlined, between the Paradigm and the Tale? It appears to break down—we must refer the reader here to Dr. BARNES's book—in various instances, such as the story of the Pool of Bethesda, of Jairus, of the healing of the epileptic boy, and in particular of the feeding of the thousands. Of the last-named story our writer offers a rationalizing interpretation of his own, but his main contention is that the story is deeply imbedded in the gospel tradition, and probably came from Peter himself. It is no Tale but a sign-post, a key-passage, in the history of our Lord's ministry.

And as for the Legends, they are said by Dibelius to have been invented to satisfy a later curiosity about persons who had come in contact with our Lord. For example, he discovers Legends in the call of Simon and Andrew, in the forgiveness of the sinful woman, and even in the story of Martha and Mary, though he falters a little in dealing with this story.

But take the story of the forgiveness of the sinful woman. Dibelius lightly assumes that the anointing of Jesus in the Pharisee's house, related by Luke, is to be identified with the anointing at Bethany, described in Mark and Matthew. Further, the Lucan narrative is put down as a Legend on the assumption that its object is to give additional information to the curious about the woman who anointed the Lord at Bethany, namely, that she was a well-known sinner. But on Dibelius's theory we must ask, Why did not Luke also invent a name for her? And why did not Luke assimilate his whole narrative to that of Mark, instead of leaving the two narratives with so many points of contrast?

The Rev. William PATON, Secretary of the International Mission Council, has augmented his own reputation and our indebtedness to him in his recently published *Christianity in the Eastern Conflicts* (Edinburgh House Press; 2s. 6d. net). It bears the sub-title 'A Study of Christianity, Nationalism, and Communism in Asia.'

Our readers must have noticed from our review columns what widespread attention the topic of Christianity and its two present-day rivals is receiving. Among the books on this theme by distinguished writers a high place is merited by Mr. PATON's. In India, China, Manchukuo, and Japan, a numerically weak Christian Church is faced by mass movements which tend either towards Communism or towards a Nationalism which may easily take a Fascist form. Mr. Paton describes and estimates the situation in those lands and in the Near East, as he has personally witnessed it and been impressed by it.

That description occupies the first section of the book and is put under the heading 'Things Seen.' It will be read with fascinated interest by all who desire a well-balanced statement of the facts, the perils and the hopeful features of the position. In Mr. PATON's view, while it is a day of crisis, it is no less a day of promise and of opportunity.

The second section is headed 'Reflections'; and while they are directly suggested by things seen in the East, they are of great significance for ourselves. For it is not only in the Orient that a new age is struggling—sometimes, it seems, blindly—into being. It is, naturally, more distinctly marked there, where the peoples are waking and stretching themselves after a long sleep, and where Christianity stands out against a background of ancient non-

Christian faiths. But who among us does not feel that here, too, in the West we are involved in the birth-throes of a new world which fills us now with panic, now with hope? So it may be not merely of interest but of some real profit to our readers if we briefly summarize some vital remarks made by Mr. Paton in his chapter on 'The Gospel in the New Age.'

Here, we take it, Mr. PATON stands alongside the many who have expressed the conviction, or at least the hope, that the triumph of early Christianity in the first centuries of our era may be paralleled by a victory of Christianity in this bewildered age, if we can only recapture its spirit, its enthusiasm, and its faith, and suitably to our times proclaim the vital truths which Apostles taught. Well, what was their message?

Mr. PATON distinguishes for us five vital points which may be found to lie in the records of Apostolic teaching and writings. In the first place the early Christian teachers and preachers had a doctrine of 'the living God working in history.' This marks a profound difference between the Christian religion and all other. It was a conviction of Judaism, indeed, before Christian days. The conviction of the prophetic message was that the living God works in history, that He was working out a purpose in world-affairs which were all leading up to a supreme culmination. That was the faith and expectation of Israel. That the fulness of the times had come, that Messiah had appeared, was the first great conviction that sent out and enthused the Christian missionaries. And we must preach to-day the living God, active in history with a plan which He is working out, and in which He calls us to be His messengers and fellow-labourers. We must get firm conviction that we have to do not with a God necessitated by philosophical speculation, nor with a postulate of ethics, nor with a first or final cause, but with the living God, planning, acting, and choosing; Creator, Redeemer, and Judge; the living God working in history.

Let us interject at this point a single remark. It seems to us that it may well turn out that this recalling us to the fear of the living God will be the element in Barthianism which will be remembered as the most valuable service to religion which the movement has rendered. But we prefer Mr. PATON's view that this living God not only breaks into history, but works in history.

Yet God does most assuredly break in, and Mr. PATON's second point is that the early missionaries taught 'God made Man.' That was the supreme event in which the Divine plan and all God's workings came to a head. Only in the Incarnation could God's loving purpose be revealed. This Incarnation was not the kind of theophany with which Eastern religion has been familiar—'a miraculous portent without reference to the complex of history.' 'Suffered under Pontius Pilate' is in the creed to express the Church's profound conviction that in Jesus Christ God broke into history in a unique way. 'The Christian message is not of Life, Light, and Love; it is of God becoming man for our salvation.'

For thirdly, the doctrine was one of 'forgiveness and saving from sin.' Neither in Jesus' own words, nor in the Epistles, is there any note of 'empty though splendid tragedy' about the death on the Cross. Nowhere in the New Testament is Jesus the martyr-hero whose untimely end raises the question 'to what purpose is this waste?' Always the death is the Father's Will. 'Here supremely He is about His Father's business.' In the New Testament we search in vain for any deploring of the tragedy. There always rings out a song of joy and release into new life and power because sin is forgiven and its power broken by the energies released by Jesus' death and resurrection. And if we saw men as St. Paul saw them—'brothers for whom Christ died'—'a great deal of the world's policies would stand condemned.'

Fourthly, the doctrine was 'a doctrine of society.' From Abraham's day existed an idea of a Divine society, variously conceived as time passed, as a remnant, a suffering community, the ideal congregation. 'The individual Christian lives in the Spirit, but it is a life lived in fellowship.' The

Church though not of the world is in the world, not alien to the world but exhibiting the true way of life. The Church in the name of Christ will resist all that is contrary to His spirit. It will not treat the world as though the world had no good in it, but it will contest the notion 'that men can invent a human society so good and well-adjusted that it shall no longer need to be redeemed.' So we are always finding ourselves in a tension between our duty to things as they are and our witness to the better order which can come only as men become Christian.

Lastly, it was 'a doctrine of man.' Only Christianity deals realistically with man and with the truth as to his nature. Christianity considers man in his relations to God and to his fellows and sees him in perpetual contradiction bearing a Divine image which has been marred. But it is convinced that through Christ man is salvable and the image restorable. To be saved man must die to self. That means that we must surrender 'the whole range of ideas associated with the autonomy of man and his inherent worth and dignity,' and yield to the truth that 'life is a matter of persons living together as God wills'; 'allowing the spirit of Christ which is not a spirit of discord or aloofness, but of love, joy, and peace to recreate from within.'

Can we Have Religion without God?

By Professor J. M. Shaw, D.D., Queen's Theological College, Kingston, Ontario.

I. That religion is native or natural to man, and as such a universal human phenomenon in the sense that wherever man is found there we find also some form of religion—this is an assumption from which we may start in this article.

What this is which is thus universal, of which we find traces in the history of every tribe and every race, it may be difficult to say. The forms in which religion has manifested itself in history are so many and varied that it is not easy to say what there is in common to them all which entitles them to be called religion. William James, in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, finds the constant element in religion in 'a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call "something there," more deep and more general than any of the special and particular "senses" by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed' (p. 58). More specifically and definitely we may say the common element in religions is the belief in a Divine being or beings outside and above ourselves on whom or on which we feel ourselves somehow dependent, and the attempt on man's part under a sense of his own weakness and frailty and consequent need of succour and help to come into communion or fellowship with this superhuman Power or Powers for the fuller satisfaction of the needs and demands of his life. Original Buddhism may seem to be an exception to such a definition, inasmuch as apparently it possessed no such belief, but whether it was properly a religion or not rather a philosophy is a debatable question. The very fact that it was not until it was transformed into a polytheistic system that it became a popular and vital faith is a strong indication that in its earlier form it was felt to be defective as a religion. So that we may say that the belief in a Divine being or beings is a fundamental presupposition of all religion, at least in its more developed forms. It is in the thought or faith-assumption of a superhuman and Divine reality that all historic religion is rooted.

II. A tendency has recently manifested itself, however, chiefly in the United States of America, to represent religion without this belief, to speak indeed definitely and explicitly of 'religion without God.' This is the position, in particular, of what is called 'scientific humanism'—a humanism which has to be carefully distinguished from the more properly 'literary humanism' of to-day led by men like the late Professor Irving Babbitt of Harvard and Dr. Paul Elmer More of Princeton. As expressed, for example, in the collaborated volume *Humanism and America*, this literary humanism, according to Professor Babbitt, ranges itself definitely on the side of those who believe